DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 392 709 SO 025 889

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TITLE Motivation and News-Seeking Behavior.
PUB DATE Apr 95
NOTE 19p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (San Francisco, CA, April 18-22, 1995). Research supported by a grant from Whittle Communications.
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Attention; Citizen Participation; *Citizenship Education; Citizenship Responsibility; Comprehension; *Controversial Issues (Course Content); *Current Events; Intermediate Grades; Middle Schools; *Perception; Public Affairs Education; Secondary Education; Social Problems; Social Studies

ABSTRACT

This study focuses on students' acquisition of current events knowledge, attitudes about the news, and motivation to seek the news as it relates to news seeking behavior and studying current events in school. A current events knowledge test of 53 true/false items and a questionnaire assessing motivation strategy use toward current events were administered to 451 students from 5 midwestern high schools, 1 southeastern high school, and 1 middle school. A sub-sample of the students from two classrooms in one of the schools was further examined with teacher interviews on how they incorporate the study of current events into their classrooms and their goals for use of current events knowledge. In general, those students who watched the least amount of television news and read the news the least had the poorest responses on the current events knowledge test, news attitudes measures, and motivational measures, while those who watched television and read the news the most had the most adaptive responses on these measures. Contains 12 references. (EH)

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Motivation and News-Seeking Behavior

RUNNING HEAD: Motivation and News

ED 392 709

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Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, San Francisco, CA, April 1995. This research was supported by a grant from Whittle Communications. Address all correspondence to: Lisa Linnenbrink, 1400G School of Education, Leadership & Learning Lab, University of Michigan, 610 E. University, Ann Arbor, MI 48109-1259 or Eric M. Anderman, Department of Educational and Counseling Psychology, 251 D Dickey Hall, The University of Kentucky, Lexington, KY 40506-0017.

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Abstract

Unfortunately, a large number of students lack current events knowledge; therefore, we must discover ways to encourage students to be interested and knowledgeable about the news. This study focuses on students' (n=451) acquisition of current events knowledge, attitudes about the news, and motivation to seek the news as it relates to news seeking behavior and studying current events in school. In general, those students who watch the least amount of television news and read the news the least have the poorest responses on the current events knowledge test, news attitudes measures, and motivational measures, while those who watch and read the news the most have the most adaptive responses on these measures. When we analyzed the differences between watching television news and reading news, we discovered that reading the news is more strongly related to increased current events knowledge, depth of understanding news, and motivation to study the news. In a secondary study, two social studies teachers were interviewed in order to compare current events curriculum and assess which methods effectively teach students to value and seek out the news without external motivation. Teacher A's curriculum consisted of reading a current events magazine once a week, being tested on that information, and discussing it in class; discussions were dominated by those students who knew a lot about the information. Teacher B tried to relate current events to everyday life and topics learned in school through frequent, in-class discussions and worksheets about world leader information. Although the sample size was too small to find significant differences within this secondary study, we did find that class B tended to value the news more, use mastery focused motivational strategies more (class A tended to be more extrinsically motivated), and watch more television news at home.

Introduction

An array of studies suggest that students' knowledge of current events is quite poor (Johnston, Brzezinski, & Anderman, 1993; Times Mirror Center for The People & the Press, 1994). The introduction of CNN Newsroom and Channel One into over 10,000 middle and high schools acknowledges these alarming statistics. Nevertheless, relatively few studies have addressed the predictors of current events knowledge during adolescence. Although the adult population watches and reads the news for such reasons as interest, curiosity, and to gather information (cf., Robinson & Levy, 1986), adolescents may in fact engage in news-seeking behaviors for other reasons (e.g., to learn about the news, because they are "tested" on it, to demonstrate their knowledge, etc.). The motivation behind seeking the news, attitudes about the news, and news knowledge may also vary depending upon the type of news seeking behavior, either watching television news or reading the news, that is involved.

Past studies have shown that watching television news and reading news both play important roles in acquiring current events knowledge and forming opinions about political issues (Atkin & Garramone, 1984; Conway, Wyckoff, Feldbaum, & Ahern, 1984; Garramone & Atkin, 1986; Milburn & McGrail, 1992). Both television media and print media lead to increased discussions with friends and family members, which may in turn lead to increased critical thinking about social issues. The above studies, however, show conflicting results about the effectiveness of watching television news versus reading news.

Milburn and McGrail (1992) studied the dramatic effects of television and found that watching television news reduces in-depth cognitive processes due to stereotypes portrayed in the news and overdramatization of news stories. This is further supported by Atkin and Garramone (1984), who found that adolescents who watch television news frequently agree with the viewpoints shown by the news reporters. It seems that although large amounts of information can be gained by watching television news, the information

is presented from a biased viewpoint and thus viewers are not required to think critically about the information they have seen; instead, they adopt the portrayed viewpoint of the news reporter.

Although research has been done on the ways that information is gained from the mass media, little research is available about the most effective way to teach students current events in school. Because research in this area is not available, it is not surprising that varied approaches to teaching current events are quite common in school districts. Some teachers teach purely factual information that is recalled later on a test of current events knowledge, while others emphasize the importance of general knowledge and value of the news through discussions. It is important to examine which teaching methods are related to increases in students' intrinsic motivation to seek the news because increased motivation may lead to continued news seeking behavior in adulthood (Johnston, Brzezinski, & Anderman, 1994).

The present studies examine the relationship between various news seeking behaviors and various motivational and cognitive outcomes. In addition, one of the studies uses interviews with two teachers in order to gain a better understanding of the processes and practices for teaching current events that are used in social studies classrooms, and the ways that these practices are related to students' knowledge, understanding, and desire to learn about current events.

STUDY #1

Method

Participants

The subjects for the first study are 451 students from six high schools and one middle school. Five of the high schools are located near a large midwestern city, while the other high school is located near a major southeastern city.

We asked each participating school to select students from three classes to complete a current events knowledge test and a questionnaire assessing motivation and

strategy use toward current events. The schools were asked to select classes that represented typical/average students of the school as well as possible.

The overall sample is 44% male and 56% female. The ethnic breakdown of the sample is 75% Caucasian, 14% African American, 5% Latino American, and the remaining 6% consist of a variety of students from various ethnic backgrounds. The participants were in grades eight through twelve, with 9% in the eighth grade, 24% in the ninth grade, 31% in the tenth grade, 11% in the eleventh grade, and 26% in the twelfth grade.

Measures

Students completed a true/false test of current events knowledge consisting of 53 questions. The content of the test was based on content analyses of various news stories which occurred over the past three months (see Johnston, Brzezinski, & Anderman, 1994). The questions assessed students' knowledge of recent changes in the Soviet Union, events in South Africa, Bosnia-Herzegovina, the Middle East, and knowledge about AIDS/HIV.

Students also completed a questionnaire assessing their goals, values, and strategies for understanding news stories. These measures were based on items from the Patterns of Adaptive Learning Survey (PALS - Midgley, Maehr, & Urdan, 1993) and items from the Johnston's longitudinal study of Channel One (Johnston, Brzezinski, & Anderman, 1994). All items were scored on a five point Likert scale. We also asked students demographic questions, and questions about how often they read and watch the news at home.

Scales were based on exploratory factor analysis. We used mean scores on items which loaded on each unique factor to form the scales. We developed reliable scales measuring students' mastery goals, extrinsic goals, relative ability goals, values, deep strategies, self-efficacy, and news seeking behavior. All alphas exceed .70. (See Appendix A for sample items.)

Results

We used cluster analysis to examine different patterns of viewing TV news and reading newspapers at home, following similar procedures to those reported by Pintrich, Anderman, & Klobucar (1994), and Flanagan & Anderman (1995). We developed seven groups based on these analyses. These groups consisted of one group of 54 students who neither read nor view much news at home (Group 1); a group that reads a lot but views little at home (Group 2, N = 36); a group that reads little and reports average viewing habits (Group 3, N = 40); a group that reads little but views a lot of news at home (Group 4, N = 68); a group that reports medium (average) viewing and reading behaviors (Group 5, N = 59); a group that reports hi reading and viewing behaviors (Group 6, N = 85); and a group that reports medium/average reading and hi viewing behaviors (Group 7, n = 79).

Since it is possible for the groups formed by the cluster analysis to differ on important demographic characteristics, we used chi-square analyses to examine this possibility. Results indicated that there were no significant differences in group membership based on gender, grade level, father's education, overall GPA, and grades in social studies classes. In groups 2, 5, 6, and 7, a larger percentage of the students' mothers were college graduates than in the other groups ($\chi^2 = 43.71$, $p<.01$). Group 4 had a higher proportion of African American students (25%) than the other groups ($\chi^2 = 16.64$, $p<.05$).

Next, we examined the ways in which these groups varied on the current events knowledge test, the motivational scales, and grade point average. We used a one way Analysis of Variance design to examine these effects. These results are presented in Table 1. All F-values for group differences are significant.

Post-hoc Tukey tests suggest that Group 1 (Lo-Medium Reading, Lo Viewing) in most cases has the poorest responses on the measures: they report using deep strategies when learning about the news the least, they report being the least mastery oriented, the least relative-ability focused, and the least efficacious. In addition, they report the least

out of school news-seeking behaviors, they report valuing the news the least, and they obtained the lowest scores on the current events knowledge test. However, this group does not have the lowest grade point average, although the post hoc test failed to detect differences between the groups. In contrast, Group 6 (hi reading, hi viewing) has the highest/best responses on most measures.

In summary, although the results are complex, the general trend which emerges is that students who read the news at home generally report higher levels of motivation and knowledge, although these students do not necessarily have the highest grade point averages.

STUDY #2

Method

Participants

The subjects include a sub-sample of the students from two classrooms in one of the schools which participated in the first part of the study.

Class A, taught by a female social studies teacher, contained 29 students ranging from eighth to twelfth grade. The majority of these students were white. The educational level of the parents was fairly evenly distributed with the largest proportion of fathers (41.4%) completing some college and the largest proportion of mothers (55.2%) graduating from high school. There were more males (58.6%) than females in class A.

Class B, taught by a male social studies teacher, contained 19 white twelfth graders of which 47.6% were male. The educational level of the parents differed somewhat from that of class A with the largest proportion of fathers (66.7%) graduating from college and the largest proportion of mothers (45%) graduating from high school.

Interviews

A short teacher interview was conducted by the researchers during which the teachers were asked how they incorporate the study of current events into their classrooms and what they think students gain from the study of current events (i.e., how

this encourages the students to actively seek current events knowledge). Specifically, the teachers were asked about the type of homework and the benefit of the homework that they assign, the current events curriculum that they use in their classrooms, and the frequency and content of discussions about current events that occur in their classrooms.

Results

The curriculum of class A consisted of reading a current events magazine once a week and being tested on that information. Other than studying for the current events test, the students did not receive any other current events homework. During class discussions on issues in this magazine, those students who were already informed about current events tended to dominate the discussions, while those who were not informed did not participate. Teacher A hoped that students would gain an awareness of current events and that the students who did not actively participate in the discussions would learn passively from those who were informed.

In contrast, teacher B tried to relate current events to other subjects that students were studying as well as show students the importance of current events in everyday life. Students in class B received some current events homework, including geography worksheets, world leader information, and vocabulary related to current events, which the teacher hoped would help them gain greater mastery and understanding of the news. Classroom discussions were also used to help students think more critically about news events and social issues.

Both classes watched the *Channel One* news program daily. Teacher A did not discuss her usage of *Channel One*; on the other hand, teacher B mentioned that he often used *Channel One* to initiate classroom discussions based on the content of the news program.

Differences between students in the two classrooms were analyzed using the survey administered in the first part of the study. We ran a series of independent T-tests to examine these differences (see Table 2). Due to the small sample size, there were no

significant differences between the students in class A and B; however, several measures did approach significance. Class A students tended to be more extrinsically motivated to study the news; students in class B appeared to value the news more than students in class A and they also seemed somewhat more mastery oriented toward learning current events. Students in class B also tended to watch more television news at home than students in class A.

Discussion

Results of the present studies suggest that different patterns of news-seeking behaviors at home are related to students' reported motivational and cognitive strategies for understanding the news. Pintrich (1989; see also Pintrich, Anderman, & Klobucar, 1994) suggested that different patterns of motivation and cognition may lead to similar academic outcomes. In the present studies, our data suggest that students with different reading or viewing patterns may exhibit different patterns of motivation and strategy usage; in some cases these patterns lead to similar levels of news knowledge, while in other cases, different patterns of news-seeking behavior and motivation/strategy usage lead to different levels of knowledge.

Students in Group 6 (Hi Read, Hi View) and Group 2 (Hi Read, Lo-Med View) reported using the most deep strategies, being the most mastery-oriented, being the most relative-ability focused, and got the highest scores on the current events knowledge test. However, these students did not have the highest overall grade point average.

Students who read news may have scored higher on their depth of understanding news scale due to the increased effort necessary to read a news article, as demonstrated by Garramone and Atkin's study (1986). In addition, print news articles are not dramatized and do not portray stereotypes as readily as television news (Milburn & McGrail, 1992); therefore, the reader is forced to think more critically in order to interpret and understand the article for himself or herself. The results of this current study add validity to those found by Milburn and McGrail (1992) and Atkin and Garramone (1984)

which show the negative effects that watching television news has on thinking critically about social issues.

Intrinsic motivational strategies, such as mastery orientation, were also used by those students who frequently read the news at home. Higher levels of mastery orientation towards the news may be due to the additional effort necessary to comprehend the news and process the information that the news article presents. Although the finding that both mastery orientation and relative-ability orientation were related to frequent reading of the news may seem contradictory, Harackiewicz and Elliot (1993) have found that both performance goals, such as relative ability goals, as well as mastery goals are related to intrinsic motivation. They assert that intrinsic motivation is increased in students who are achievement oriented when performance goals are emphasized; at the same time, intrinsic motivation is increased in students who are not achievement oriented when mastery goals are stressed. This may help to explain why both mastery orientation and relative-ability orientation were related to frequent news seeking behavior.

Although these findings are correlational in nature, they suggest that students who take the time to read about the news at home tend to (a) think about the news more critically, (b) be somewhat more motivated toward the news, and (c) know more about the news. These results may be partially due to the fact that more of the mothers of students in groups 2 and 6 are college graduates than in some of the other groups; however, the mothers of the students in groups 5 and 7 are also more likely to be college graduates. Students in these four groups report reading the news at home more often than students in the other groups. Future studies which examine parental news-seeking behaviors and attitudes toward the news might provide more empirical evidence supporting the observed trends.

The interviews with the teachers suggest that teachers' classroom practices may be related to students' attitudes and motivation. Although the student sample was not large enough to detect statistically significant differences between the two classes, the results

suggest that students in class B, where current events were discussed and related to the social studies curriculum, were more mastery oriented toward the news and valued the news somewhat more, compared to class A, where students were tested on the news weekly. One possible explanation for this is that the curriculum of class B may be more beneficial to students because it emphasizes the relationship between current events and subjects that students study in school as well as "real life". Students who understand the importance of current events in their everyday lives may value the news more and attempt to understand the causes behind particular news events or issues in the news. Students in class A tended to be more extrinsically motivated towards studying the news which may indicate that they only study the news because they know that they will be tested on it or because they want to impress the teacher during class discussions. Because these conclusions were based on a relatively small sample size, they should be replicated with larger samples.

Although reading news is positively related to current events knowledge, depth of understanding news, the relative ability focus on the news, and the mastery orientation towards the news, educators should not attempt to force students to read newspapers in order to learn about current events because they may begin to resent the news and may actively avoid it. Therefore, we must encourage students to read newspapers and seek current events information by sparking the students' interest in social issues. One way to do this, as shown by the higher valuing and levels of mastery orientation of news in class B, is through in-class discussions that relate news topics to other areas of study and to life. In addition, it has been shown by Milburn and McGrail (1992) that television news often presents biased viewpoints and overdramatizes news stories, thus reducing critical thinking about the news stories and preventing the viewer from making his or her own decisions about the issues presented. Classroom discussions that present multiple angles from which to view the news stories seen or read by students may help to counteract this negative effect of watching television news by encouraging students to think critically

about social issues. If schools can utilize the mass amounts of information that are relayed to students via mass media through in-class discussions and projects, the depth of understanding news, value of news, mastery of news, and current events knowledge might increase among students.

This study does not explain how schools should utilize the role of the mass media; however, one possible solution might be the use of in-class discussions. More research must be done in order to give more complete information about the roles that schools can have in conveying the importance of social issues and current events to students and the ways that schools can utilize the large amounts of information that are conveyed through mass media. In addition, this research does not examine causal relationships. A more in-depth, longitudinal study based on these findings should be done in order to determine causality.

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Appendix A

Scale	Sample Items
Mastery Goals	I take my time to figure out news stories.
Extrinsic Goals	I read about or watch the news only when the teacher requires it.
Relative Ability Goals	I like to show that I know more about national and world events than other students.
Value of News	It is important to know about what is going on in the news.
Deep Strategies	When I'm watching or reading the news, I try to figure out why things are happening.
Self-Efficacy	Even if the news is hard, I can learn it.
News Seeking Behavior	How many times last week did you read the newspaper for news?

All items, except for the news seeking behavior items, are based on a 5 point Likert scale, where 1=Not at all true of me and 5=Very true of me. Most of the news seeking behavior items are free response, continuous items.

TABLE 1: ANOVA Examining Differences in Group Membership and Motivational/ Cognitive Measures

	F	Group 1 Lo-Med Read, Lo View (n=54)	Group 2 Hi Read, Lo-Med View (n=36)	Group 3 Lo Read, Med View (n=40)	Group 4 Lo Read, Hi View (n=68)	Group 5 Med Read, Med View (n=59)	Group 6 Hi Read, Hi View (n=85)	Group 7 Med Read, Hi View (n=79)
Deep Strategies	14.00***	2.25	3.15	2.48	2.79	2.80	3.33	3.01
Extrinsic Goals	14.33***	2.55	2.07	2.20	1.61	1.84	1.33	1.71
Mastery Goals	22.66***	2.50	3.47	2.88	3.03	3.14	3.84	3.42
Relative Ability	7.74***	1.91	2.77	2.00	2.51	2.13	2.92	2.49
News Seeking	8.89***	2.85	3.18	3.02	3.04	2.95	3.50	3.27
Self Efficacy	5.96***	3.30	3.66	3.66	3.63	3.59	4.04	3.70
Value	16.96***	2.84	3.79	3.52	3.72	3.77	4.26	4.01
News Knowledge	3.21**	16.13	19.00	16.59	17.86	18.68	19.21	17.10
GPA	2.18*	2.83	2.50	2.65	2.91	2.56	2.40	2.43

The number of students in each group varies somewhat for each measure, due to missing data. All data represent means on 5 point scales, except the News Knowledge score, which is the sum of correct responses on the current events test (maximum score = 53), news-seeking (1 = low, 4 = high). GPA is reverse coded (1 = highest, 5 = lowest).
*** p<.001 ** p<.01 * p<.05

TABLE 2: T-Tests Examining Differences Between Class A and Class B

	Class Mean		T	p-value
	Teacher A	Teacher B		
Extrinsic Goals	2.32	1.92	1.57	0.12
Mastery Goals	3.05	3.36	-1.46	0.15
Value News	3.22	3.70	-1.66	0.10
Watch T.V. News	3.61	4.19	-1.46	0.15

All data represent means on 5 point scales.